

My name is Jane Arestia and I am from New Canaan. I am testifying on the Governor's proposed budget H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 that unfortunately does not include critical funding for our safety net providers and their employees.

After decades of underfunding, Connecticut's direct support providers are in crisis mode because the effects of the pandemic have impacted their ability to attract and retain direct care workers and other employees. This staff is critically important to the safety and well-being of many of Connecticut's most vulnerable residents.

As a parent and legal guardian of an individual with autism and developmental disabilities as well as a seizure disorder, sufficient funding of staff is critical to the future health and well-being of my son and so many others. Matthew is 41 years old and has been able to live independently in Stamford with minimal supports, following many years of training and support from the schools and DDS, but those supports are critical to his being able to continue to do so. He has a paid job two mornings at the Ferguson Library in Stamford, and other days he volunteers at Stamford Hospital/Tully Center and at his agency for day services, ARI of CT. He is capable of working more than he currently does, but there is not enough support in his DDS budget to train him for more. He walks and uses bus/train transportation to the greater Stamford/Norwalk area, an area of strength that was built on by past transportation training. Ensuring that our loved ones live in a supported and inclusive community environment is essential and the programs and services developed by the DDS must reflect this approach. The recent challenges brought about to all of us by Covid has underlined the need for individuals who are living independently to be better served during crisis times when isolation occurs.

I speak also as a Board member of ARI of Connecticut, a small but vibrant agency in Stamford which manages group homes, supports individuals living in apartments, and other individuals who are served by ARI day and employment services. I am concerned about the substantial expenses not always fully funded to private providers, which creates a need for continual fundraising, which should not be going to support basic needs. Providers should be able to fully focus on delivering services, not constantly wondering if they will be funded and struggling to find qualified staff.

Governor Lamont proposed a budget that does not provide any new funding to help stabilize providers like ARI so that we can ensure that we are fulfilling our mission for the individuals and families we serve and providing the best possible work experience for our employees. ARI and all other providers of ID/DD services have not had a rate increase for administrative and general expenses in over 16 years and have not had a rate increase in Room & Board revenue (what the residents pay to live in group homes for food and shelter) in over 7 years.

The only new funding that is in the budget for ID/DD providers is for new program development, but providers cannot build on a shaky foundation and grow programs without a stable workforce. It is critical that the state increase pay rates beyond what has been done for wages and benefits. Now more than ever, we need to ensure that critically necessary funding of \$150 million is included in this year's budget for the state's non-profit providers who care for our loved ones daily. We urge your support and ask that you add this funding to the budget before this committee.

Thank you for your time and for listening.

Jane Arestia